



The Board Develops Policy

IC 36-12-3-3

Ask any board member to define the board's job and you'll likely hear, "The board's job is to set policy." Ask for a definition of policy and you'll probably get no more than a confused look.

"The board's job is to set policy."

To do your board member job well, you must understand policy because that's where you'll be spending your time--making policies, wrestling with policy issues, interpreting policies, monitoring policy effectiveness, enforcing policy, setting direction for the library through policies, protecting yourself and the library through a good set of policies.

You probably have unwritten family policies: "Homework will be completed before the television may be turned on." The Constitution of the United States is full of policies for our country: "Congress shall make no law respecting establishment of religion."

A good set of written board policies...

- informs everyone of board intent, goals, and aspirations.
- prevents confusion among board members, staff and the public.
- promotes consistency of board action.
- eliminates the need for instant (crisis) policy making.
- reduces criticism of the board and management.
- improves public relations.
- clarifies board member, director and staff roles.
- gives the director a clear direction from the board.

Policy is written

Policy is a written statement of the process and procedures for handling a specifically defined issue. Just entering a motion into the meeting minutes that says the board will follow a particular direction is not policy. Relying on board tradition to be board policy is not enough. Determination of how the board handled an issue the last three times is not policy.

Board policy is a carefully designed, written general statement of direction for the library, formally adopted by a majority vote of the board at a legally constituted board meeting.

Using the general guidelines of board policies, the director and staff will write rules and regulations for operation of the library. For example, your library board may develop a policy that says the library will have a video collection for public lending.

The director and staff will then write guidelines for purchasing materials for the collection, lending rules for the collection and various other regulations necessary to maintain and manage the collection.

Board policy is not...

Your bylaws are not your board policies. Bylaws are a higher and more permanent set of guidelines for how the board will operate. They are usually harder to change than board policies and do not cover the broad scope of how the library will operate.

Board policies are not laws. There is little need to repeat in board policy those statutes that already have the force of state or federal law, unless the board policy spells out some special manner in which the library will implement or comply with a law. For example, if state law prescribes when your fiscal year will begin, there is no need to repeat that law in a board policy.

A board should "develop" policy and not just "write" policy. Good policy grows out of a lengthy process of studying the issues and needs, gathering facts, deliberating the issues, writing the policy and reviewing the policy annually.

***The process
for
developing***

Let's look at policy development step by step.

1) Identify the need. Unfortunately, many library policies are a direct result of a problem or even a crisis rather than a result of careful planning and foresight.

When a delegation of "concerned citizens" appears at your board meeting demanding that you eliminate your collection of videos, it's very easy to identify the need for a policy on censorship and another policy to control citizen conduct at board meetings.

A better way to identify need for particular policies is to anticipate problems and write policies before the problems occur. Study other library policy manuals. Ask the State Library, Library Development Office for help, 317-232-3697 or 1-800-451-6028 (Indiana only). Policies from other libraries can be loaned to you by the Library Development Office. See also the following link on the Indiana State Library's web-site for examples of policies from Indiana public libraries.

<http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/isl/ldo/pol/plpolicies.html>

Pay attention to what's happening with other libraries in the state and across the nation. If a library in Iowa ends up in litigation for denying access to materials or services of the library, your library should review your own access policies. Learn from the mistakes of others.



2) Gather the facts. Most policies will grow out of recommendations from the library director. Your director is in touch with trends, problems and issues that demand policy statements from the board.

Depending on the nature of the policy, you may want to ask for public input, seek legal counsel or even hire a consultant to help you develop a policy.

3) Deliberate the issue. This is where your perspective as a representative of the community to the library comes into play. You know community standards and community needs. Careful deliberation of a proposed board policy should include several considerations.

Is the proposed policy...

- really necessary?
- consistent with our mission statement?
- within the scope of our authority as a board?
- consistent with local, state and federal law?
- compatible with our other policies?
- practical?
- broad enough to cover the subject completely?
- enforceable?
- affordable?

4) Write the policy. The actual wording of the policy is best left to the library director or a task force of board members and director rather than the full board struggling with wording. The actual policy may come to the board and back to committee for revision several times before it's finalized. Making good policy takes time.

Final approval of the written policy is a board responsibility and should be done at a formal board meeting.

5) Review your policies annually. Although you write policies to be durable, policies do become out of date, and an out-of-date policy can be as bad as having no policy at all. Annual review of your board policies can help you keep your policies current and at the same time keep board members current about board policies.

***The policy
manual***

To make your board policies usable, they should be collected and codified in one manual. The manual makes the process of learning board policy simple for new board members and it makes application and interpretation of policies easier.

A manual also makes the process of review and update of board policies much easier. An all-at-once approach to revision is much too cumbersome for any board. An easier way is to give every policy a date and then make sure the board or a committee of the board examines each policy on or before that date each year. That makes it an ongoing process and much less overwhelming.

All changes in the policy manual must have full board approval.

A. Policies needed to fulfill requirement of "Minimum Standards for Public Libraries" - 590 IAC Article 1

1. Library board by laws
2. Long-range plan
3. Automation plan which includes a technology plan (a separate technology plan is also acceptable. The technology plan must have the following to qualify for Universal Service Fund discounts under federal regulations (if your library applies for the Universal Service Fund discount under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the technology plan must be approved by the Indiana State Library):

- a. a three year technology plan
- b. goals, training, budget, inventory/needs assessment, and an evaluation component for the plan
4. Collection development policy
5. Personnel policy and procedures
6. Principles of Access/Circulation Policy

B. Travel policy (could be a part of the Personnel policy Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 8-3

C. Employee benefits (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 8-1

1. Sick leave
2. Vacation leave
3. Personal leave
4. Leave time/compensatory time/payment of overtime
5. Public employee's retirement fund (PERF)
6. Deferred compensation plan

D. Moving and interview expense policy (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 8-4

E. Records excepted from disclosure policy - IC 5-14-3-4(b), (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 6-4

F. Disaster recovery plan for computer systems, (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 5-4

G. Investment policy - IC 5-13-7-7, (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 9-14

***What
are the
policies/
plans
required
by
Indiana
law?***

H. Public Purchasing policy - IC 5-22-3-3), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 10-7 (Small Purchase Policy-under \$25,000)

I. Internet Acceptable Use policy - IC 36-12-1-7, federal laws: Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act (N-CIPA)

J. Fines and Fees policy (could be part of the circulation policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 1-3

The Library Development Office has copies of other by laws and policies. You can have these interlibrary loaned to you at any time during the year.

***Other areas
to consider
for written
board
policies***

The list below is not a comprehensive checklist of policies your board should have. These are categories for your consideration and a few examples of the types of policies that fall under each category.

• **board operations**

board/director relationship
meeting procedures
methods of adopting policies

board member ethics
committees

• **services**

types of programs and services offered
selection of materials
circulation/registration collection development
confidentiality

service goals
intellectual freedom

• **community relations**

community use of facilities
public solicitation and advertising in the library

news media relations

• **building and grounds**

construction contracts
facility planning
maintenance requirements

disposal of property
naming of facilities

- **administration**

authority delegated to the director
evaluation of the director
compensation of the director

- **business**

service contracts
purchasing

budgeting
insurance

inventories

- **personnel**

recruiting
personnel records
sexual harassment
reduction in force
staff development

hiring
part-time help
safety/health
salary and benefits
paid/unpaid leave

termination
evaluation
transfers
grievances

For models of library board policy manuals, contact the Library Development Office of the Indiana State Library, 317-232-3697 or 1-800-451-6028 (Indiana only).

Notes: